DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 018 CS 508 424

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TITLE Core Works in Journalism and Mass Communication.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Joint Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association and the Central States Communication Association (Lexington, KY, April 14-18, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; *Intellectual Disciplines; *Journalism; *Mass Media; National Surveys; *Scholarly Journals; Scholarship; *Teacher Attitudes; *Textbook Selection
IDENTIFIERS Professional Concerns; Research Synthesis; Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

A study investigated leading mass communication scholars' opinions concerning the most influential works in their development as scholars, what books or journal articles they would recommend for aspiring scholars, and which researchers in the field are doing promising work. Fifty-one scholars identified through previous studies as being the most productive mass communication scholars during the years 1980 to 1985 were sent open-ended questionnaires. Although 31 of 51 surveys were returned (for a response rate of 60%), several of the respondents felt unable to identify key works in mass communication and journalism because their background was in speech communication. Results indicated that: (1) respondents found it much easier to identify "classics" in mass communication and journalism than to identify "contemporary" core works; (2) several scholars bluntly stated that the field lacks a coherent center; (3) none of the journal articles receiving two or more nominations were published after 1976; and (4) scholars nominated as doing promising work included Steven Lacy, James Carey, Steven Chaffee, and Byron Reeves. Findings suggest evidence of an increasing diversity of voices within the discipline. (Tables listing books cited as most important in scholars' own development, books most recommended to aspiring scholars, and journal articles cited as most influential are included. Contains 15 references.) (RS)

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CORE WORKS IN JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

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CS508424

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CORE WORKS IN JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Aspiring scholars in journalism and mass communication face a daunting task in orienting to their discipline. Journalism and mass communication scholarship ranges across all levels of analysis, from the individual to socio-cultural systems. This scholarship draws from an eclectic mix of theories and methods from the social sciences and the humanities. Such eclecticism makes it difficult to identify the defining characteristics of communications research. In addition, accelerating technological and economic changes in the communications systems adds to the flux and complexity of the study of communications. Although the concept of "communication science" has been proposed as a framework for unifying the various disciplines that study communication (Berger & Bradac, 1987), this proposal is strongly challenged in some quarters (e.g. Hall, 1989). The current study looks at how some leading scholars in journalism and mass communication perceive the discipline in terms of its key exemplars.

One avenue of understanding a discipline's character is to identify those works that scholars regard as the best examples of past and current scholarship. Comparing their views of valuable works in the past and in the present would reveal both continuities and important changes in scholar's understanding of their discipline.

A number of studies have measured scholarly productivity in journalism and mass communication by counting the number of articles or citations by given researchers in scholarly journals (e.g. Cole & Bowers, 1973; Greenberg & Schweitzer, 1989, Schweitzer, 1988; Vincent, 1984). We preferred to approach scholarship in a more qualitative vein, by soliciting opinions about which works scholars see as most

influential and important. We decided to solicit the opinions of researchers who were very active during a period of considerable theoretical ferment (Gerbner, 1983). We choose John Schweitzer's lists of the most published and most cited works in nine journalism and mass communication journals between 1980 and 1985 for this purpose (Schweitzer, 1988; Greenberg & Schweitzer, 1989). Selecting scholars from this particular time period assured us that all of the members of our sample had witnessed developments in the field for at least a fifteen year period. We were also interested in the degree of consensus which existed among these scholars about core works.

Schweitzer (1988) identified 50 of the most published in nine journalism and mass communication journals from 1980-1985. Greenberg and Schweitzer (1989) produced a second list of the 50 most cited authors in the same journals during that time period. There was a 96% overlap between the two lists. Forty-eight of the most published people were also listed as the most cited individuals. We merged the two lists for purposes of this study. We then checked with several association directories, (including SCA and AEJMC), and determined that all of the scholars on these lists were still active in higher education.

The use of this strategy had several limitations. Schweitzer's picture of scholarly productivity in mass communication and journalism is incomplete because it indexes publications in only nine journals. However, our research problem did not require a comprehensive definition of "scholarly prominence" and publication in leading scholarly journals was germane to our interest in research exemplars.

The use of these lists also limited the size of our sample. However, we felt that absolute sample size was less important given the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study. We also believed that the perspectives of these scholars have "information value" in their own right (e.g. scholarly prominence and depth of perspective).

We asked these scholars to respond to the following questions:

1. What books were most influential in your development as a scholar?
2. What books would you currently recommend for aspiring young scholars?
3. What research articles in the history of the field would you consider to be most influential in journalism and mass communication research?
4. What researchers in the field are doing work which you feel has the most promise for adding to our knowledge about the field?

METHOD

The 51 scholars identified in the two articles by Schweitzer (1988) and Greenberg and Schweitzer (1989) were mailed a three-page questionnaire along with a return envelope. We utilized open ended questions in order, to impose as little structure as possible on our respondents' responses. At the same time, we recognized that the use of open-ended questions increased the burden on our respondents. Therefore we simply asked respondents to list up to the five most important books, the five most important journal articles, etc. We felt that this procedure reveal the most memorable exemplars. Using a free-response format also allowed us to judge the "spontaneous" degree of consensus which existed concerning the exemplars.

RESULTS

We received 31 of 51 surveys for a return rate of 60%. However, several of the respondents felt unable to identify key works in mass communication and journalism because their own background was in the area of speech communication. Several respondents declined to answer specific questions, or gave a general response to a question. However these general comments were often incisive. Some of these comments are included in the following text.

The books that respondents nominated as significant in their development as scholars are listed in Table 1. Twenty-seven of our respondents listed at least three "classics." The table lists only those books that received at least three nominations. The three top nominations were The process and effects of mass communication (Schramm & Roberts, 1971), Public opinion (Lippmann, 1922), and Foundations of behavioral research (Kerlinger (1973). Five other nominations received three or more mentions. We also analyzed the lists to determine what percentage of the recommended books were introductory theory or research methods books. Eighteen percent of the nominations, evenly split between theory and research methods books, fell in this category. All of the research methods texts listed were written by scholars outside of the communications.

Place Table 1 About Here

Collectively the respondents recommended 78 books for aspiring scholars. Twenty-eight of these nominations received more than two votes; only nine received three or more nominations. Four of the books identified as historical classics were also listed as important for current scholars. The top three recommended books were Public

Opinion (Lippmann, 1921), Press and public (Bogart, 1981), and Deciding what's news (Gans 1979). Lippmann's classic work was still highly recommended with a total of six nominations.

We also compared the two lists for each respondent to determine how frequently respondents recommended that aspiring researchers should read the same works that had a formative influence on their own development. About one-third of the books currently recommended were also on the "classics" list. We also found that the percentage of communication theory and research methods texts in the second list was virtually identical with the percentage in the "formative books list"- 18%. Four of the top nine rated books were introductory communication theory or research methods books. The key difference between the first and second lists is that the research methods books recommended to aspiring scholars were written exclusively by mass communication and journalism scholars. Although several books devoted specifically to mass communication or communication research have been around for a long time (e.g. Nafziger & Wilkerson, 1949), it appears that communication research methods books have firmly established their identity within the discipline.

Outside of the basic theory and research methods texts, there were a number of books recommended to aspiring scholars from between the years of 1985-1990. However, none of these books received more than two nominations. Democracy without citizens (Entman, 1989) was the most recent work to receive multiple nominations.

Several respondents gave general answers to the question by saying that young scholars should read "any and all" books in research methods and communication theory. One respondent suggested that "most

books are outdated by the time they are published." A second person advised students to "Learn the history of the research enterprise so you can be disgusted by present behaviors." Another respondent remarked, "At the risk of wounding their egos, I think many of the young scholars would do well to read Strunk and White and several other books on grammar, style and usage. As a reviewer for several journals, I see a large number of wretchedly written manuscripts."

Place Table 2 About Here

Identifying journal articles which have been most influential to the discipline was a rather difficult task for our respondents. The number of nominations per respondent answering this question was lower than for the first two questions (3.2 nominations vs. 4.5 or better on the other two questions). Several respondents said that it was not feasible to specify articles which have relevance to the entire field because the field is too fragmented. Several others explained that they were listing articles that were most influential in their particular subfield. In response to this question, one person flatly said "None are universal."

Table 3 lists four journal articles which received three or more nominations as the "most influential in the field." McCombs and Shaw's (1972) initial article on agenda-setting received 11 nominations. No other article received more than four nominations. Two scholars reported that they felt that trade publications and popular magazines such as Mother Jones provided more insight and information about the industry than articles in the mainstream academic journals.

Place Table 3 About Here

On the question of which scholars are currently doing promising work "with a potential to add new knowledge to the field," our respondents nominated 40 individuals. Eight candidates received more than two nominations: Steven Lacy, James Carey, Steven Chaffee, Byron

Reeves, Charles Salmon, Pamela Shoemaker, Kuu Ho Youm and Robert Entman. One respondent praised Lacy's work by saying "His economic studies may help save the industry!" Another respondent said that Jim Carey got us to "reexamine the very way we conceptualize communication." Charles Salmon was praised for his "work on disentangling and testing the spiral of silence which promises to shed light on important social processes neglected in mass communication research."

Other respondents declined to mention specific scholars, but identified areas of study which they thought needed more work. Three people mentioned ethics as an area needing more research attention. One respondent wrote, "Given the general moral decline we've seen in this country, the study of ethics has become critical. Some scholars have examined ethical issues and problems, but much more needs to be done. Thus far, we don't even have an adequate book, textbook or scholarly book, that addresses the issues effectively."
Several scholars expressed a desire for the field to move away from a preoccupation with media effects toward institutional analyses of the communication industry as a whole. As one respondent put it "I think communication researchers have long been preoccupied with positivistic or near positivistic micro studies of processes and effects, while macro questions about the nature and functioning of communication systems have been investigated only infrequently ... knowing more about the economics of media would further our understanding of why they behave as they do."

Several scholars expressed disappointment with the current state of research in mass communication and journalism. One respondent wrote,

"These are tough times for research. New ideas are needed. Agenda setting, cultivation, etc., are nearing burnout. The respondent then suggested that researchers need to pay much more attention to sampling and research design so that we can begin to "add up our research findings." He ended by saying that meta-analysis showed some promise as well. One journalism professor claimed that "Journalism professors aren't doing any significant mass communication research. Its being conducted in other departments-and its not being published in communication journals. The important work is being published in Mother Jones, Extra, and other mass circulation journals." Another scholar dismissed the notion that there is a core body of knowledge in journalism and mass communication by saying, "I'm still waiting for someone to figure out what the field is .... journalism and mass communication is a working title for a set of subjects that range from thermodynamics to linguistics to 13th century Ukrainian free verse. It is not a field."

DISCUSSION

Our respondents found it much easier to identify "classics" in mass communication and journalism than to identify "contemporary" core works. Perhaps it merely takes time for a consensus about the value of present work to coalesce. The above quotes also demonstrate that a number of scholars are vexed by the fragmentation and lack of coherence in the field. In addition to complaints about the lack of methodological rigor, several scholars bluntly stated that the field lacks a coherent center. We suspect that this lack is due to the loss

of supremacy by the media effects paradigm. The exemplars provided by Lazarsfeld and Hovland now face considerable competition.

Delia's (1987) historical account of the rise of mass communication research as a distinct and unified field of study in the decade following World War II suggests that the "coherence" emerging from this period was accomplished at a considerable cost: "The constriction of communication research was built on a spurious view of its history (p. 84)." The attempt to organize the broad scope of communications under a single "scientific" umbrella, marginalized historical and critical research, devalued nonquantitative work and drove a wedge between public and interpersonal communication processes. Hence, the sharp challenges issued to this research tradition in the 1970s from interpretive and critical approaches was part of a natural dialectic which restored some of the diversity (and fragmentation) to the field which had existed in the study of communication in a variety of disciplines prior to WW II.

The pattern of responses to the "most influential articles" question provides some support for Delia's (1987) analysis. None of the articles receiving two or more nominations came after 1976. The lack of recent exemplars could indicate an impoverishment of journalism and mass communication research. However, an alternate interpretation is that the unifying framework of the media effects paradigm begins to diminish after the ideas of agenda-setting and cultivation entered the scene. The importance accorded to agenda-setting is particularly interesting (e.g. McCombs & Shaws article received nearly 20% of the nominations of the total article nominations). The prominence of agenda-setting may be due to the fact

the concept helped extend the life of the media effects tradition by 10 years. However, cultural, historical, and critical viewpoints also began to reemerge from a generation of obscurity because of an increasing awareness of the cultural and institutional analyses being conducted by European researchers. Real (1989) documents the growing awareness that the mass media could not be studied in isolation from larger socio-cultural systems. This in turn led to analyses of the cultural forces influencing message generation in addition to examining message effects. The metatheoretical debates of the late 1970s also helped to reestablish the legitimacy of multiple perspectives in the study of communication processes and institutions. In retrospect, the unity provided by the media effects paradigm may have been an aberration. The present competition of voices may represent the "healthy norm" in the history of research in mass communication and journalism.

This exploratory study provides evidence of an increasing diversity of voices within the discipline, which is consistent with recent historical analyses of mass communication research (Bineham, 1988; Delia, 1987, Krippendorf, 1989). Accepting the fact of multiple voices, and coping with this diversity, may be the primary task that aspiring scholars in journalism and mass communication must master.

TABLE 1: BOOKS CITED AS MOST IMPORTANT IN OWN DEVELOPMENT AS A SCHOLAR

Number of Nominations	
9	Schramm, W. & Roberts, W. F. (1971). The process and effects of mass communication. Urbana, IL: University

of Illinois Press.

6 Kerlinger, F. (1973). Foundations of behavioral research. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

6 Lippmann, W. (1921). Public opinion. New York: MacMillan.

5 Ithiel De Sola Pool, Frey, F & Schramm, W., Maccoby, N., & Parker, E. (Eds.), (1973). Handbook of communication. Skokie, IL: Rand McNally.

5 Klapper, J. T. (1960). The effects of mass communication. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

4 Kline, G. & Tichenor, P. J. (1972-1975). Current perspectives in mass communication research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

4 DeFleur, M. (1966). Theories of mass communication 2nd Ed. New York: David McKay.

3 Blumler, J. G. & Katz, K. (Eds.), The uses of mass communication. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

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*Unless specifically identified the first edition of the work in question is always listed.

** A complete list of all works receiving two or more nominations can be obtained from the first author.

TABLE 2: BOOKS MOST RECOMMENDED TO ASPIRING SCHOLARS

6	Lippmann, W. (1921). Public opinion. New York: MacMillan.
4	Bogart, L. (1981). Press and public. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
4	Gans, H. J: (1979) Deciding what's news. New York: Vintage Books.
4	Mass communication review yearbook series (Vol. 1-6). Beverly Hills, Sage: (1980-1987).
3	McQuail, D. (1987). Mass communication theory: An introduction. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
3	Schramm, W. & Roberts, W. F. (1971). The process and effects of mass communication. Urbana, University of Illinois Press.
3	Severin, W. J. & Tankard, J. (1979). Communication theories: origins, methods, uses. New York: Hastings House.
3	Stempel, G. H. & Westley, B. (1989). Methods in mass communication research 2nd Ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
3	Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (1991). Mass media research: An introduction. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

* A complete list of all books receiving two or more nominations can be obtained from the first author.

TABLE 3: JOURNAL ARTICLES CITED AS MOST INFLUENTIAL IN JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Number of Nominations:	Articles cited
11	McCombs, M. & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda-setting function of the press. Public Opinion Quarterly, 36, 176-187.
4	White, D. (1950). The gate keeper: A case study in the selection of news. Journalism Quarterly, 27, 393-400.
3	Katz, E., Gurevitch, M. & Haas, H. (1973). On the use of the mass media for important things. American Sociological Review, 38, 164-181.
3	Westley, B. H. & McClean, M. S. (1957). A conceptual model for communication research. Journalism Quarterly, 34, 331-338.

* A complete list of all of the articles receiving two or more nominations can be received from the authors.

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